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**VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH HONORS PUBLIC HEALTH NURSE OF THE YEAR**

(RICHMOND, Va.)— For Pat Winter, director of nursing for the Western Tidewater Health District and recipient of the Virginia Department of Health's (VDH) 2005 Public Health Nurse of the Year Award, the compassion and fortitude needed to be a public health nurse is all in a day's work. Winter was honored at a ceremony in late May recognizing her more than 20 years of effort in the assessment, planning, management, and evaluation of all public and clinical nursing programs.

Winter has been employed by VDH since 1983, when she started as a public health nurse supervisor in Isle of Wight County. In 1985, she was promoted to director of nursing for the Western Tidewater Health District, covering the cities of Franklin and Suffolk and Isle of Wight and Southampton counties.

Public health nurses are constantly reaching out to their communities, making tremendous contributions toward improving the health of individuals, families and groups living in them. They provide a safety net of health services for many underserved populations, offering immunization clinics, family planning education, prenatal and pediatric care, disease control and prevention, and counseling. Public Health Nurses are committed to promoting health, detecting problems early, and restoring individuals to their optimal level of functioning.

"Pat is an example of the rare, but highly effective leader who inspires others to do their best. It has been said that public health is a team sport and Pat exemplifies the best of a team player." Jeff Lake, VDH's deputy commissioner for community health services.

When Western Tidewater was severely flooded by Hurricane Floyd, Winter spearheaded a team to provide public health response in the community. Over several weeks, the team conducted community assessments, staffed emergency shelters, assisted the public in safe cleanup of the environment, provided community education and immunized nearly 5,000 emergency workers and Western Tidewater residents.

In response to a series of devastating hurricanes that pummeled Florida last fall, the Florida Department of Health asked Virginia to send a team to help. Winter led a team of 27 nurses, outreach workers and support personnel to staff an emergency shelter in Indian River County, Florida. The shelter housed more than 300 elderly residents and people with special medical needs. The Virginia team provided direct health care and a safe environment that protected health and provided emotional support.

"In public health, the community is our patient and, in this case, the shelter became our community," said Winter. "We were able to use our public health skills to prevent disease within the shelter community."

In 2002, Winter continued her community health advocacy when she implemented a grant for medication assistance for the City of Franklin and Southampton County residents. The grant provides \$1 million in free medication for more than 500 residents. Physicians in the area have observed that the health of many patients, particularly senior citizens, has stabilized as a result of the grant. Hospitalizations and emergency room visits caused by high blood pressure, asthma, diabetes and other illnesses common to Western Tidewater have also significantly decreased.

(more)

“Pat not only understands the mission of public health, she demonstrates her understanding through her actions. She is well respected throughout the Commonwealth for her knowledge, management skills and hard work,” said State Health Commissioner Robert B. Stroube, M.D., M.P.H.

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